

Justified

(ROMANS 3:21—4:25)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read Romans 3:21—4:25. This lesson references chapter 3 in Be Right. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Paul's theme in the second section of his letter was salvation—righteousness declared. He proved that all people are sinners; so his next goal was to explain how sinners can be saved. The theological term for this salvation is *justification by faith*. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of

Christ on the cross. Each part of this definition is important, so we must consider it carefully.

—Be Right, page 45

1. What do you think of when you hear the word justification? How is the common usage of the word different from Paul's use? What does it mean to be justified by faith?

More to Consider: Wiersbe writes, "Justification is an act, not a process. There are no degrees of justification." Why is it important to see justification as a single act? What implications does this have for believers? Nonbelievers?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from Romans 3:21—4:25 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here. What strikes you about this verse?

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Do not confuse justification and sanctification. Sanctification is the process whereby God makes the believer more and more like Christ. Sanctification may change from day to day. Justification never changes. When the sinner trusts Christ, God declares him righteous, and that declaration will never be repealed. God looks on us and deals with us as though we had never sinned at all!

—Be Right, pages 45–46

3. How might Paul's description of justification have led to the early Christians' concern that his theology might promote wanton sinning? If justification occurs just once, is that alone enough for a Christian? Why or why not? How do justification and sanctification work together in the life of a believer?

From the Commentary

Under the Old Testament law, righteousness came by people behaving, but under the gospel, righteousness comes by believing.

—Be Right, page 46

4. Respond to Wiersbe's comment in the excerpt. In what ways do Christians today still attempt to attain righteousness by behaving? Why is

this so tempting for Christians? Is it easy or difficult to accept the truth that righteousness comes merely by believing? Explain.

From Today's World

It's a common belief in today's world that you get into heaven by being "a good person" and "doing good things." Take a moment to review the spin popular culture puts on actors' and musicians' and other public figures' "acts of goodness" (everything from driving a hybrid automobile to adopting orphans from third-world countries).

5. What sort of message does this spin on "goodness" give to nonbelievers? What reaction do you think nonbelievers would have upon hearing the truth that God's righteousness can't be earned, but is received only by believing? How does the phrase "you get what you pay for" influence the way nonbelievers perceive what it takes to get into heaven?

More to Consider: Romans 3:23 is a very familiar piece of Scripture that states "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In what ways does this verse directly challenge the popular belief about what it takes to get into heaven?

From the Commentary

Faith is only as good as its object. All people trust something, if only themselves, but the Christian trusts Christ.

—Be Right, page 46

6. What sorts of things do people put their faith in (apart from God)? As you consider these, how does Wiersbe's excerpted statement hold true? Why can Christians "boast" of their faith in Christ? What does that really mean?

From the Commentary

Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.

—Be Right, page 47

7. Respond to Wiersbe's statement. Now go through Romans 3:21—4:25 and circle anything Paul writes to support this truth. What does it mean that salvation isn't cheap? What is the cost of salvation?

From the Commentary

God must be perfectly consistent with Himself. He cannot break His own law or violate His own nature. “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and “God is light” (1 John 1:5). A God of love wants to forgive sinners, but a God of holiness must punish sin and uphold His righteous law. How can God be both “just and the justifier”? The answer is in Jesus Christ.

—Be Right, pages 48–49

8. Why is it difficult sometimes for Christians to reconcile the “love” and “righteousness” of God? How does Paul defend Jesus Christ as the answer to this difficult question?

From the Commentary

The fact that Abraham was justified by grace and not law proves that salvation is for all. Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7, 29). Instead of the Jew complaining because Abraham was not saved by law, he ought to rejoice that God’s salvation is available to all men, and that Abraham has a spiritual family (all true believers) as well as a physical family (the nation of Israel). Paul saw this as a fulfillment of Genesis 17:5: “A father of many nations have I made thee.”

—Be Right, page 52

9. Why might the Jews complain that Abraham wasn't saved by the law? Would there be a need for a Messiah if he hadn't been saved by the law? Why or why not? Why do you think Jews don't rejoice that Abraham was saved by grace? Why ought we as Christians rejoice in this truth?

From the Commentary

But Abraham did not walk by sight; he walked by faith. What God promises, He performs. All we need do is believe. Abraham's initial faith in God as recorded in Genesis 15 did not diminish in the years that followed. In Genesis 17—18, Abraham was "strong in faith." It was this faith that gave him strength to beget a son in his old age.

The application to salvation is clear: God must wait until the sinner is "dead" and unable to help himself before He can release His saving power.

—Be Right, page 53

10. Respond to Wiersbe's statement that "God must wait until the sinner is 'dead' ... before He can release His saving power." When is man "dead"? How does this play out in Abraham's story? In the story of all humankind?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of Romans 3:21—4:25. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What does it mean to you to know you are “justified by faith”? What does being justified “feel” like? What are the evidences of justification in your life?

12. What are some things you've put your faith in that have let you down? What have they taught you about faith? Do you ever feel let down by God? Why or why not? What is more likely: that God has let you down or that you somehow are missing out on what God is really doing in your life? Is it easy to put your faith in an invisible God? Why or why not?

13. How might your life be different if you had only the law to pursue in order to become righteous? How does God's grace change the way you live your life?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you need to work on accepting the once-and-final-ness of your justification by faith? Do you need to work on putting your faith in Christ alone? Be specific. Go back through Romans 3:21—4:25 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Read Deuteronomy and make a mental note of all the laws that man had to follow in order to become righteous before God. Then give these laws a modern spin and imagine how your life might be different today had Jesus not yet arrived as the Messiah. Talk with a Jewish friend about how he or she approaches what it

means to become righteous before God. Then be sure to pray for your Jewish friends to see Jesus as the Messiah so they, too, might know and receive justification by faith.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've previously noted. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the "Going Forward" section in this lesson. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read Romans 5:1–21. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 4, "Live Like a King!" in Be Right.*